

Minutes – Policing Strategy and Performance Committee Meeting

Date: 16 September 2021

Venue: Remote Video-Conference

Committee Meeting

Attendance

Authority: Deborah Donnelly (Committee Chair), Moling Ryan, Shalom Binchy, Stephen Martin, Ronan Nolan (external member)

Apologies: N/A

Secretary: Mark Nother

Executive: Helen Hall, Margaret Tumelty, , Michal Alfasi-Hanley, Karen Shelly, Gráinne Curtin (Part A only), Judy Higgins

1. Closed session – Committee members

Committee members did not exercise the standing option to conduct a closed session.

2. Minutes of the previous meeting and matters arising

The minutes of the previous meetings were approved. A discussion on specialist recruitment arose from the previous minutes and it was agreed to bring the matter to the attention of the Authority, and to the Commissioner through the Chief Executive. No conflicts of interest were declared.

The Chief Executive provided an overview of any pertinent developments since the last meeting of the Committee, and the Committee Chair provided an overview of communication between the Committee Chair and Deputy Commissioner, Policing and Security, concerning the agenda for this meeting.

3. Policing Performance Assessment

An overview of engagements undertaken since the July meeting was provided by the Executive, including remote interactions with the Garda Síochána and with external stakeholders. A number of emerging issues were identified for follow-up with the Garda Síochána under various agenda items in Part B of the meeting.

Following a discussion on performance against the Policing Plan, a number of matters were identified for follow-up with the Garda Síochána representatives in Part B of the meeting.

4. Community Policing

The Committee considered materials provided by the Executive concerning the Community Policing Framework, Garda Reserve Strategy and Crime Prevention Strategy. A number of matters were identified for discussion with the Garda Síochána representatives in part B of the meeting.

5. Organised Crime and Drugs Policing

The Committee discussed matters pertaining to organised crime and drug and drug-related policing, and considered material provided by the Executive. A number of areas were agreed for follow-up with the Garda Síochána representatives in Part B of the meeting.

Part B – Meeting with Garda Síochána representatives

Attendance

Authority: As previous

Executive: As previous

Garda Síochána: Deputy Commissioner Anne Marie McMahon (Policing and Security), Assistant Commissioner Paula Hilman (Roads Policing and Community Engagement), Assistant Commissioner John O’Driscoll (Organised and Serious Crime), Andrew O’Sullivan (Chief Information Officer), Gráinne Shortall (Policing Authority Liaison Office).

6. Closed session

The standing option to conduct a closed session was not exercised. There were no matters arising from the minutes of the previous meeting.

7. Policing Performance

An update on issues of note, including progress made and challenges experienced in respect of the Policing Plan, and crime trends was provided by Deputy Commissioner, Policing and Security. An anticipated rise in burglary in the run up to Christmas (and in parallel with a relaxation in COVID-19 restrictions) will continue to be addressed by Operation Thor in the coming months. A decrease in the rates of detections was noted by the Garda Síochána representatives, and it was outlined that this is being monitored at a divisional level with the support of the Garda Síochána Analysis Service (GSAS).

The Garda Síochána representatives welcomed the publication of the Authority’s Assessment of Policing Performance – published 09 August – and acknowledged the assessment of progress made and issues raised within it. In particular there was an acknowledgement of the commentary made in respect of human resources and workforce planning.

The Committee commended the Garda Síochána on the progress reported in respect of the Policing Plan and the level of targets which remain on course to be achieved by year-end.

In response to a Committee query on imminent launch of Operation Go Slow, the Garda Síochána representatives described the operation as a regionalised focus on lifesaver offences, including education (in conjunction with the Road Safety Authority) and enforcement. The Committee heard that an area of ne focus within the education strand will be on drivers over 65 years of age, who are disproportionately represented in recent statistics. The Committee also heard that GSAS analysis, and supported by information from the RSA, would support an operational approach of targeted, intelligence led patrolling and checkpoints and that sufficient analysis capacity was in place to support this.

A discussion around the numbers of mandatory intoxication tests (MIT) being carried out at checkpoints revealed that the numbers of MIT checkpoints and Operation Go Slow are independent of one another, although they have the same ambition, and the numbers of MIT were reduced when the Roads Policing Units were carrying out COVID-19 checkpoints, but are increasing and are expected to increase further towards the end of the year.

The Garda Síochána representatives provided the Committee with an overview of the online reporting of Hate Crime facility that launched on 21 July. It was outlined that a number of crime incidents, deemed both hate and non-hate following review, were reported through the system in the period following the launch. The Committee heard that the system is viewed as an early success, in particular given that a number of cases have emerged that had not previously been reported to the Garda Síochána.

The Committee sought further clarity on the governance and quality assurance processes for engagements with victims of domestic abuse. The Garda Síochána outlined that only specially-trained members, primarily those within Divisional Protective Services Units (DPSUs) are involved in making these follow-up calls, and that consistency is a focus across all divisions. In respect of the approximate 40,000 contacts or attempted contacts reported as arising from Operation Faoiseamh, the Committee requested that further information on this activity be provided by the Garda Síochána.

The Committee raised concerns over the reported reduction in the rate of detections generally. The Garda Síochána representatives spoke to the available data and described ongoing activity aimed at addressing the trends. The Garda Síochána representatives noted that these trends are multifactorial and are impacted by changes and improvements in data quality and measurement, and the changed crime environment, among other factors. It was outlined that proactive measures were being undertaken at regional and divisional level to address same. The Committee heard that, in addition to the national level, each region has a detection improvement plan in place that is updated monthly. In response to a Committee query it was confirmed that measures to improve the identification of best practice and sharing of such between regions/divisions were actively considered within the organisation.

The Committee queried the reported decrease, year-on-year, in the number of searches undertaken by the Garda Síochána, both searches of the person and searches under the Drugs Act, and were informed that the numbers of searches performed under COVID-19 restrictions were increased relative to the norm due to proactivity by Garda members and an increased ability to identify those involved in criminal activity as a result of the lower footfall. It was reported that to an extent the level of search activity reflects the number of members on the beat, despite any restrictions on movement of people and associated decrease in footfall in public places. Recently, the numbers of searches have returned to more normal levels as restrictions have eased. The Committee expressed an intention to return to the subject of detections later in the year.

8. Community Policing

The Committee welcomed the emphasis being put on community policing by the Garda Síochána and made reference to the previous day's discussion event hosted by the Authority on community policing which featured input from the Garda Síochána. The Garda vision for community policing was outlined by the Garda Síochána representatives as being one which aims to see people have confidence in their community Gardaí, for people to know their local community Garda, and for the work of the community Gardaí to really contribute to a positive quality of life. This work, the Committee heard, involves external partner agencies and the approach to that is being maximised, as well as internal liaison with specialist units, such as roads and drugs policing units in each area, with the community Gardaí leading or supporting as appropriate to ensure an appropriate and cohesive response.

Community Policing Framework

The Community Policing Framework was described by the Garda Síochána representatives as an internal strategy that was developed in partnership with statutory and non-statutory agencies, who are necessary for successful implementation. It was described that community policing is an ethos, and that all Garda members are involved in community policing duties to some extent and that the Framework merely puts a formal structure around that. It was acknowledged that the Framework may need to be further reviewed following consideration of the learnings arising from the COVID-19 period.

The Garda Síochána representatives described how in urban areas the Framework aims to improve quality of life through improved safety and confidence in the Garda Síochána response to community needs, including increased engagement and the building of local community knowledge of where to turn for help and support. In rural areas the Framework will seek to deliver a renewed focus on the traditional community police service, as was seen during the COVID-19 lockdowns.

The Committee noted that successful community policing often seems to depend on individual performance, and that resourcing may become an issue, particularly in urban areas. The Garda Síochána representatives outlined that, in terms of standard deployment density, community Garda members are often: full-time in urban centres, deployed as part of a large community policing unit; full-time in medium density areas and towns, as part of a smaller, dedicated unit; and, part-time in rural small stations, sharing these functions with other roles. It was outlined that in total there are currently approximately 1600 community Garda members.

The Garda Síochána representatives noted that there are issues with measurement of performance in community policing; that additional vehicles and the availability of Mobility devices are improving the capacity of community Garda members; and, that geographical consistency will improve when the correct measures are in place. The Garda Síochána representatives noted that evaluation of service delivery will involve data analysis, and there are challenges posed by the current lack of resources in GSAS, but that the ultimate success of community policing will be measured by the Public Attitudes Survey and qualitative gathered through stakeholder engagement.

The Committee raised concerns regarding the lack of analyst capacity within the organisation generally and resultant the risks posed by to the Framework given the central role of data analysis. The Garda Síochána representatives outlined that at a high-level, data gathering and data sharing represents a challenged to large organisations, including the Garda Síochána, and that the ability to share and/or access data can be restricted and dependent on data-sharing agreements. It was provided that there is an appreciation of the shortfall of capacity currently and that this is on the risk register. Specifically it was acknowledged that there is a recognised shortage of analysts and while some improvement has been made in this regard in recent years that more is required to address the current issues.

Reserve Strategy

The Committee considered the Garda Reserve Strategy 2021-25 provided by the Garda Síochána, and questioned the Garda Síochána representatives about the current capacity and deployment of the Garda Reserve, including plans to engage current and recruit new members. The committee reflected that the current Strategy represents an aspirational long-term plan and sought further detail as to the short-term deliverability of a functioning, well-managed cohort within the workforce. In response, the

Committee heard that work needs to be done with HR, with an aim to include more applicants from minority and diverse communities, as well as Gaeltacht areas, before further recruitment to the Reserve; there are currently approximately 450 members, but that over 200 of these members have been inactive for longer than two years. Of this cohort it was provided that ongoing outreach was being undertaken to ascertain those who wished to remain in service. The Committee heard that to date approximately 75% of this cohort had responded with 45% wishing to remain within the Reserves and 55% indicating they would be resigning. The Committee heard the Strategy will be published when plans to recruit are better developed.

In terms of changes to policy and procedure contained in the Reserve Strategy, the Garda representative expressed that an individual point of contact, who could in most cases be a local Sergeant, rather than an Inspector, would be preferable and that the duties of Reserve members should include regular policing, community policing and policing events. There is a will to scope independent patrolling by Reserves, but that would require legislative change. The lack of a representative body was mentioned, and a need for Reserve members to feel valued and have improved powers, as well as a necessary cultural shift towards increased use and deployment of these members as the Reserve grows. The Committee indicated its intention to return to matters pertaining to the Garda Reserve at a future date, including engagement on same at the September Authority meeting.

Crime Prevention Strategy

The Garda Síochána representatives provided an overview of the Crime Prevention Strategy, which primarily focusses on high volume crime types, but includes instances where that translates to serious crime at a local level. It was outlined that it is organised at a divisional level and co-ordinated through the Community Engagement Bureau, involving proactive and educational work that has significant overlap and synergy with other initiatives. The Community Policing Units lead the initiative with support from the national office, focussing on the management of prolific, high-risk, and serious offenders in each locality, in addition to known locations (hot-spots) for high volume crime offending. The Garda Síochána representatives relayed that since its establishment, an internal group has been set up to monitor implementation of the Strategy, a communications plan is in place, and a CPD structure put in place to train all relevant officers is being rolled out.

9. Quarterly Update on Organised Crime and Drugs

The Committee requested a written report on two of the Policing Plan 2021 targets, relating to the activities of Divisional Drug Units (target 2.4.1), and the seizure of drugs, firearms and currency (target 2.8.3). An undertaking was given by the Garda Síochána representatives to provide such a report in future within the monthly Policing Plan Performance Report.

A verbal update was given on aspects of Operation Tara, work with local drugs taskforces to respond to drug-related intimidation, the impact of drug dealing and intimidation on local communities, resourcing of and co-operation between specialist units.

In respect of the resource issues reported, and previously discussed, in respect of the Garda National Economic Bureau and the Garda National Cyber-crime Bureau, the Garda Síochána representatives clarified that no business cases were currently submitted and/or awaiting approval of the Authority. Rather, it was outlined, a number of business cases and identified positions remain with the Garda

Executive and Garda HR, as the limit of 500 new Garda staff positions – arising from the Government Decision of 2016 – has been reached and is subject to ongoing discussions between the Garda Síochána, the Authority and other stakeholders.

10. AOB

There were no items raised under AOB.
